

# The Verminator

Story and Photos by Michael Tolzmann

**F**RANCO Lidron is no heartless killer, although the squeamish have been known to scream while watching him work and the more bravehearted often marvel at his cunning and ruthless ways. Still, the residents of Caserma Ederle in Vicenza, Italy, never hesitate to call him when they encounter certain intruders or see a dangerous prowler in the neighborhood.

Snakes, rodents, insects, bats and stray cats often seek out the Army post, and every crevice or opening is a welcome invitation to be exploited.

Lidron finds great interest in these creepy creatures, but delivers swift eviction or eradication when that residency causes conflicts between man and "beast."

"For me these intruders are a normal part of things, but for most people an encounter with a bat or snake can be a big problem," said Lidron, post entomologist at the 22nd Area Support Group Environmental Management Office. "I just put the animal in a box, remove it and release it somewhere else, just like that — problem solved."

"I love this job," Lidron said, "because it's completely different from anything else, even though people often tell me they couldn't stand it!"

He said part of the job's appeal is the satisfaction it brings when he has eased someone's anxiety. One example he gave involved an unwanted visit by an arachnid.

"One day a woman called me and screamed, 'Please help me! I was in my bathtub and felt something drop on my foot.' It was a scorpion," he said. "She was scared because she thought there was a nest of them. But scorpions are usually solitary creatures, so I showed her the small hole in the ceiling where the scorpion had entered, probably attracted to the light."

Public affairs specialist Michael Tolzmann works for U.S. Army, Europe's, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Engineer.



Franco Lidron teaches Vicenza students about the variety of bug species common in Northern Italy. Here he displays a German wasp hive.



Lidron uses a live "hissing cockroach" to help students overcome their fear of insects.

Another time, Lidron was called to remove a large black snake.

"This type is aggressive, but not poisonous," he said. "I looked into the storage shed where they said the snake had gone, and the shed was full of stuff. I asked for help to clear it out, but the owners said: 'No way, the snake is in there!'"

Entomologist Wayne Patton, who works for Vicenza's Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff, Engineer, said Lidron's ability to work calmly when others are panicking is one reason he's such an asset to the community.

"Trained pest-management specialists like Franco often perform difficult pest-control operations that require special skills and patience," Patton said. "Without well-trained personnel, our facilities could become hazardous environments or be overrun with vermin. Pest management has evolved into a science that requires an understanding of how to balance the needs of man and nature."

Lidron began working at the Environmental Office in May 1998, but has worked for the Army at Caserma Ederle since 1980. He studied agriculture and entomology in college, but his first job with the Army was cooking hamburgers at the Vicenza snack bar. Some 18 years of Army employment passed before he began working in his current profession.



Students react to a large wasp from Lidron's collection.

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Lidron's approach to pest control is to ensure the health and safety of the community as he protects the environment. He's developed programs to remove stray cats that have been known to carry disease, and to install bat houses around the community. The traps are animal-safe, so that family pets or the occasional wandering hedgehog aren't injured if caught. The bat houses accommodate the insect-eating mammals, yet keep them away from housing areas where they might seek shelter and eventually spread disease.

Lidron is also very sensitive to the use of pesticides, an attitude he developed as a child. At age seven, he caught dragonflies and any other insects he could find.



Lidron and a Vicenza Department of Public Works employee install a "bat house" at Caserma Ederle.

"My love for insects is from years ago," Lidron said. "One of my teachers had a fantastic collection of bugs. He taught me how to collect and preserve bugs, and I've continued to enjoy this hobby all my life."

Lidron uses his collection during visits to schools to teach children the value of insects and the variety of life that is around them. He believes that by increasing a child's awareness of insects he can lessen the fear of them, and maybe help children to better appreciate the world around them. □